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ABSTRACT

A study was done to examine student opinion of the campus advising services at the University of California Davis campus in Spring 1990 as a follow up to a similar study conducted in 1987. The study used the Student Opinion Survey and mailed it to a stratified random sample of 1,649 students. Of the surveys sent, 57.7 percent were returned. The following findings were reported: (1) Davis undergraduates were significantly more satisfied with pre-enrollment information, catalogs and admissions publications, and orientation programs than national counterparts; (2) students were satisfied with career planning services at levels significantly lower than 1987 levels; (3) students were more satisfied with academic advising than their national counterparts; (4) about 80 percent of students reported having used some academic advising service; (5) fewer freshmen had used either academic advising or faculty advising; (6) mean satisfaction ratings for sources of academic advice ranged moderately between peer advisors, faculty advisors and staff advisors; (7) students in the College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences rated that division higher than students in the other colleges rated their divisions; (8) when rating recent experiences with their primary academic advisors, undergraduates were exceptionally positive; (9) 16 percent of students rated the advising system as inadequate for their needs. Included are eight tables. (Author/JB)

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ADVISING AT UC DAVIS—1990

A Report of Student Opinions

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HE 025 242

ADVISING AT UC DAVIS—1990
A REPORT OF STUDENT OPINIONS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study, based on the ACT Student Opinion Survey conducted in Spring 1990, examines the perceptions of undergraduates enrolled at UC Davis. It follows up a similar study of campus advising services conducted in 1987. Data were collected with a survey mailed to a stratified random sample of 1,649 students, 57.7% of whom responded. The survey included 26 questions designed to determine student use of and satisfaction with components of academic advising.

This study identifies the following major findings:

- UC Davis undergraduates are significantly more satisfied with pre-enrollment information, catalogs and admissions publications, and orientation programs than their national counterparts.
- Davis undergraduates report satisfaction with career planning services at levels significantly lower than those reported in 1987 but similar to those of students from other large universities.
- Davis undergraduates report significantly greater satisfaction with academic advising than their national counterparts.
- About 80% of UC Davis undergraduates report having used some academic advising service; 71% used faculty advising within their major.
- Fewer freshmen had used either academic advising in general (62%) or faculty advising in their major (42%) by their third quarter at UC Davis.
- Mean satisfaction ratings for sources of academic advice range from highs of 3.89 (departmental peer advisors) and 3.82 (staff advisors) to 3.67 (faculty advisors).
- Students in the College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences report higher ratings than students in the other colleges on most variables related to academic advising in general and faculty advising. Ratings of staff, peer or dean's office advisors do not differ by college.
- Students in the College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences are particularly satisfied with faculty advisors in their majors (3.96), followed by the College of Letters and Science (3.55) and the College of Engineering (3.53).
- When rating recent experiences with their primary academic advisors, undergraduates are exceptionally positive. Most report that their advisor is helpful and effective (4.06), provides accurate information (4.11), and allows sufficient time to discuss issues or problems (4.07).
- Despite overall high ratings, 16% of undergraduates rate the academic advising system at UC Davis as inadequate for their needs. The mean rating on this variable (3.34) is among the lowest in the study.

INTRODUCTION

In Spring 1990 Student Affairs Research and Information (SARI) surveyed undergraduates at UC Davis to determine their use of and satisfaction with a wide variety of campus programs and services. Using a standard instrument designed by the American College Testing Program (ACT), students rated 23 campus services and 42 aspects of the college environment. SARI sent the ACT Student Opinion Survey, together with a set of campus-developed questions, to a sample of 1,649 undergraduates, 57.7% of whom responded (n=951). The sample was disproportionately stratified by four ethnic groups: Black, Chicano, Asian, and White and all others. Therefore, responses of the whole population reported herein have been weighted accordingly.

Eight questions on the ACT instrument encompass various components of academic advising. However, because the College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences had requested assistance in conducting a study of college academic advising, SARI developed 18 additional questions probing the current use made of advising services by undergraduates as well as their unmet needs. The research questions behind the Agricultural and Environmental Sciences study include:

How satisfied are students with the primary sources of academic advising offered by the College?

How are certain qualities of academic advisors rated by students?

How well does the academic advising system meet student needs in certain specific areas?

By incorporating questions designed to study academic advising into the ACT instrument, SARI expanded the scope of the research and thus allowed all undergraduates to voice their opinions on this subject.

While preparing the final survey instrument, SARI sent the 18 questions to the other undergraduate colleges and the Division of Biological Sciences for review and comment. The only concern raised during this review is that the questions do not address all critical dimensions of academic advising. We agree with this observation and note that findings reported herein do not constitute a complete evaluation of academic advising. Readers more knowledgeable about the services discussed can best interpret them further and provide their appropriate context. For this purpose, a complete set of responses by subgroup is available upon request, as is the data set from which these responses were drawn.

Although these 26 ACT and campus-developed questions do not address all dimensions of advising, student responses to them provide insight into how well campus advising programs and services meet undergraduate needs. Further insight into advising comes from comments written in response to the following request: "Please comment on the strengths and weaknesses of your academic advising experience at UC Davis."

This report compares UC Davis responses on the eight advising variables contained in the core instrument with national norms derived from a sample of colleges with populations larger than 10,000 students (surveyed between January 1, 1987 and April 30, 1990). It also compares current results with those of 486 UC Davis undergraduates who responded to the 1987 ACT Student Opinion Survey. These comparisons provide useful contextual information within which to analyze the current results; because of differing survey methodologies, however, results of these comparisons must be viewed with some caution.

Because this report addresses a broad campus audience, it generally confines discussion to only summary statistics and findings. The report analyzes results for each set of advising variables by class level and college; overall, there were very few differences in opinions on these variables by ethnic group or gender. Where mean scores of groups differ, a significance level of .05 is used throughout this analysis to indicate there is at least a 95% chance that the groups from which the respondents come also differ.

A complete appendix of tables with responses by ethnic strata, gender, class level and college is available upon request from Student Affairs Research and Information. A detailed discussion of the methodology employed to gather these data is also available. In addition to these written materials, SARI analysts can perform additional analyses upon request or present and discuss these data in detail with interested members of the campus community (as time permits).

PRE-ENROLLMENT ADVISING

The ACT Student Opinion Survey instrument identifies three variables related to admissions or pre-enrollment advising:

College orientation program
College catalog/admissions publications
Accuracy of college information you received before enrolling

Findings on these variables alone do not provide a complete or in-depth picture of student satisfaction with admissions and pre-enrollment advising. The satisfaction ratings discussed below, however, offer some insight into what students think about key components of this area of advising.

Table 1 (page following) presents results on these variables from the 1987 and 1990 surveys and displays comparable national norms for these years as well. The data indicate that undergraduates are satisfied with these components of admissions and enrollment advising (similar to the pattern found in 1987) and that Davis students rate these services higher than their national counterparts.

Table 1
Satisfaction with Pre-Enrollment Advising

	Level of Satisfaction					Mean Ratings	
	Very Satisfied 5	4	Neutral 3	2	Very Dissatisfied 1	UC Davis	National Norms
College orientation program							
1990	30.5%	50.2%	10.6%	6.7%	1.9%	4.01	3.83
1987	29.7	48.8	17.8	3.1	0.6	4.04	3.87
Accuracy of college information received before enrolling							
1990	10.7	56.5	23.0	6.7	3.1	3.65	3.58
1987	13.9	51.9	25.3	6.0	2.8	3.68	3.63
College catalog/admissions publications							
1990	20.1	60.3	15.4	3.4	0.8	3.95	3.80
1987	20.6	60.3	15.5	3.0	0.6	3.97	3.86

Note: Means and Levels of Satisfaction are based on a five-point scale in which 5=Very Satisfied and 1=Very Dissatisfied. Only respondents who used campus programs or services rated them.

Approximately two-thirds of respondents (66.8%) report participating in a campus orientation program; among these students, over 80% report being satisfied or very satisfied with it. The mean satisfaction rating on this variable (4.01), similar to that in 1987 (4.04), is higher than reported by respondents from other large universities (3.83). Davis undergraduates also participate in orientation programs at higher rates than their national counterparts (66.8% versus 62.1%).

Accuracy of pre-enrollment information and the quality of college catalogs and admissions publications also receive high satisfaction ratings (3.65 and 3.95, respectively). On both variables, Davis students report ratings similar to those in 1987 and higher than comparable national ratings.

No consistent patterns of difference emerge among the mean ratings of students based on their undergraduate college, but differences do appear in their ratings depending upon class level. Ratings of orientation programs differ significantly by respondent level *($F=12.01$, $p<.05$)*[1]; the mean satisfaction rating for freshmen is 4.21, for sophomores 4.24, and for juniors and seniors, 3.81 and 3.77 respectively. Ratings also differ significantly by level for pre-enrollment information *($F=4.50$)* and on college catalog/admissions publications *($F=2.88$)*. Freshmen rate both of these variables higher than undergraduates at other levels.

[1]*Only F values that are significant at $\alpha=.05$ are included in this report.*

Not surprisingly in light of these relatively high ratings, few respondents commented on orientation programs or admissions publications. It may be, as suggested in the report describing the 1987 results at UC Davis, that these variables are more salient to freshmen; that as the immediacy of materials and services declines so does the degree of satisfaction with them.[2] Nevertheless, approximately two-thirds or more of juniors and seniors express satisfaction with these variables, suggesting that differences in student opinions by level are more of degree than substance.

Although the ACT instrument combines college catalog with admissions publications into a single variable, students focus almost exclusively on the *UC Davis General Catalog* in their comments, particularly the section on General Education requirements. On this point, one senior announced simply:

> GE/HSS Requirement too confusing in Catalog; clear it up!

A sophomore responded equally directly:

> This campus must make the annual Catalog more comprehensible. The Catalog is unclear about GE requirements, etc.—a student is left confused and often guessing at what is required!

A similar point was made by a junior transfer student:

> Please give transfer students more information about mandatory GE courses in the General Catalog. Also if the Catalog were in a slightly different order where GE coursework requirements were placed in a section just before the major requirements may be helpful.

Because several students comment critically on the General Education section, the campus may wish to revise this material. Clear writing in the *General Catalog* is particularly important because many students rely heavily on it for academic advice; some use it as their primary source, as one junior explained:

> My primary source of academic advice . . . is the General Catalog; at a large and somewhat impersonal university this is true for most students, keep the Catalog and the various major and GE requirements as simple as possible.

CAREER ADVISING

A second important component of advising, particularly in the minds of students, is career advising. The ACT instrument identifies two career advising services:

Career planning services
Job placement services

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[2] *Advising at UC Davis: A Report of Student Opinions,* Arthur K. Amos, Jr., Student Affairs Research and Information, March 1988.

Data on Table 2 indicate that UC Davis undergraduates are less satisfied than in 1987 with career advising although their current rating does not differ significantly from the national norm.

Table 2
Satisfaction with Career Advising

	Level of Satisfaction					Mean Ratings	
	Very Satisfied 5	4	Neutral 3	2	Very Dissatisfied 1	UC Davis	National Norms
Career planning services							
1990	12.0%	49.4%	24.2%	11.2%	3.2%	3.56	3.66
1987	17.6	56.2	20.4	5.8	0.0	3.86	3.68
Job placement services							
1990	14.2	54.7	15.6	13.2	2.4	3.65	3.57
1987	19.1	45.9	24.0	8.2	2.8	3.70	3.56

Note: Means and Levels of Satisfaction are based on a five-point scale in which 5=Very Satisfied and 1=Very Dissatisfied. Only respondents who used campus programs or services rated them.

Only about one in four respondents report using career planning (25%) and job placement services (27%). Among these students, slightly over 60% report being satisfied or very satisfied with career planning services and about 69% with job placement services; the remaining 30-40% of students express neutrality or dissatisfaction. Opinions about job placement services remain essentially unchanged. Satisfaction with career planning services, however, declined significantly *(F=10.22)* since 1987; more than twice as many students now report being dissatisfied with career planning services.

This decline in satisfaction with career planning services places opinions of Davis undergraduates more in line with those of their peers from other large universities. UC Davis ratings on this variable do not differ significantly from the national norm—only about one-tenth of a point lower. Campus ratings on job placement services also fall in line with national ratings, about one-tenth of a point higher.

Because of the relatively small number of respondents who report using these services, results by subpopulations should be interpreted with caution. Few freshmen had used either career planning (13.5%) or job placement services (10.8%), and they report the lowest level of satisfaction (3.40 and 3.46, respectively). About 45% of seniors had used career planning and job placement services; they report higher satisfaction ratings (3.57 and 3.71, respectively). Engineering students also report higher satisfaction ratings on both variables than do respondents from the other undergraduate colleges. Ratings on career planning services range from 4.14 (Engineering) to 3.40 (Agricultural & Environmental Sciences). For job placement services, students from the College of Letters and Science give the lowest rating (3.63) compared to Engineering students (3.75).

Virtually all groups of students in 1990 report a decline in satisfaction with career planning services. Although several students commented on career planning services, they provide little explanation for this decline in satisfaction. Students do not appear to attribute their increasing dissatisfaction in this area to

the performance of specific campus units; for example, only relatively mild criticism is directed at The Internship and Career Center. One senior comments:

> In regard to career planning services—overall the office/department is personable—but there are 1 or 2 staff whose attitude towards students is unapproachable.

A junior offers another perspective on career planning services:

> Department advising is excellent. Although, I wish the Career Center was more elaborate. I would like to know more about career options and growth expectations for specific majors.

as does this sophomore:

> I think you should offer workshops in career planning or, if you already do, make more students aware of it. It is hard to know where to start.

Most other comments on career planning are equally mild in tone and often positive. Those few negative ones sound a familiar theme—practical application *versus* theoretical instruction—a concern often expressed by UC Davis undergraduates about their education in general.

Examples of positive reactions to career planning services come from a sophomore and freshman respectively:

> The academic advising at UC Davis [is] quite helpful in terms of directing students to programs (internships, classes, seminars, etc.), which serve to help students to clarify their educational and professional objectives.

> I haven't used many of the offered services but the ones I have used have met my needs well. I was very confused at the beginning of this year about what to do in my life and thanks to career counseling and testing I now have a more focused goal. I believe UC Davis is a great school to prepare students to go out in the world.

A sense of frustration comes through in some comments on career advising as students report feeling unprepared for life after graduation. This frustration may partially explain why students in the Colleges of Letters and Science and Agricultural and Environmental Sciences report lower satisfaction ratings in this area than do Engineering students, whose career choices may be more clearly envisioned. One Agricultural and Environmental Sciences junior says:

> Finally, I feel that the University does not prepare me to face the real world. I feel that I know a lot about books but way little in practical experiences needed in a job. Internship is still not enough!

A sophomore from the same college echoes this response in her comments:

> UCD is an excellent university, and I feel privileged to be a student here! . . . I'm finding a lack of practical skills teaching—everything is much more theory-oriented than it has to be.

ACADEMIC ADVISING

Three variables directly related to academic advising appear on the ACT instrument:

Academic advising services
Availability of your advisor
Value of the information provided by your advisor

Although UC Davis undergraduates appear satisfied with academic advising services overall, they report lower satisfaction ratings on two of these qualities (see Table 3).

Table 3
Satisfaction with Academic Advising

	Level of Satisfaction					Mean Ratings	
	Very Satisfied 5	4	Neutral 3	2	Very Dissatisfied 1	UC Davis	National Norms
Academic advising services							
1990	16.3%	51.8%	20.2%	9.2%	2.4%	3.70	3.53
1987	13.2	54.8	20.2	9.9	1.9	3.67	3.52
Availability of advisor							
1990	15.3	36.5	32.3	10.7	5.2	3.46	3.52
1987	16.1	36.1	35.2	8.5	4.1	3.52	3.54
Value of information provided by advisor							
1990	16.4	36.1	33.7	8.4	5.3	3.50	3.43
1987	13.8	33.8	35.1	11.3	6.1	3.38	3.41

Note: Means and Levels of Satisfaction are based on a five-point scale in which 5=Very Satisfied and 1=Very Dissatisfied. Only respondents who used campus programs or services rated them.

Close to 80% of respondents report using academic advising. Use varies dramatically by level, ranging from 62.5% of freshmen to 80.9% of sophomores, 85.4% of juniors and 86.4% of seniors. This pattern, observed in the 1987 study, appears among respondents from other universities, although not to the extent observed here. UC Davis freshmen report considerably less use of advising services than do freshmen nationally (62.5% *versus* 70.6%).

Over two-thirds of all respondents using academic advising are satisfied; over ten percent are not. The mean rating on this variable (3.70) is about the same as that reported by respondents in 1987 (3.67). UC Davis undergraduates continue to rate academic advising higher than students from other large universities (3.70 *versus* 3.53).

Students rate similarly the value of information provided (3.50) and the availability of advisors (3.46). Approximately half of the respondents report being satisfied or very satisfied with these aspects of academic advising; as in 1987, Davis students do not differ from their national counterparts on these measures. Also, current ratings on advisor availability do not differ significantly from 1987. Ratings on value of information, however, went up significantly *(F=3.75)*.

There are significant patterns of difference on these three academic advising variables based on respondent class level and college. Ratings on academic advising for example, differ significantly *(F=2.66)* by level going from a high of 3.90 for freshmen to 3.62 for sophomores, 3.67 for juniors and 3.69 for seniors. Sophomores also report the lowest mean ratings on two aspects of academic advising: value of information provided (3.31) and availability of advisors (3.29); these ratings fall at least two-tenths of a point lower than those given by any other class.

Respondent ratings on academic advising services also varied significantly by college *(F=5.31)*. The mean ratings range from 3.88 (Agricultural & Environmental Sciences) and 3.72 (Engineering) to 3.63 (Letters & Science). Use of academic advising also varies by college; a larger proportion of students from Agricultural and Environmental Sciences (83.2%) use this service than other students (Letters & Science, 79.4%; Engineering, 67.9%). With respect to value of information provided and availability of advisors, respondents from the College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences report satisfaction ratings two-tenths or more of a point higher than respondents from other colleges.

Comments on Academic Advising

The final section of the survey asks students to comment on the strengths and weaknesses of their academic advising experiences at UC Davis. Although many addressed other aspects of the campus, 182 respondents commented on the quality of academic advising. This section and the report generally only quote those comments that relate specifically to questions on academic advising. These comments reflect most, but not all, of the opinions provided by respondents on this topic. Many positive comments and testimonials about particular advisors provided by respondents are excluded; interested readers may request a complete set of comments from Student Affairs Research and Information.

One major concern raised by both the 1987 and 1990 surveys is the relatively low use of academic advising reported by freshmen. Although those who use the service report very high satisfaction ratings, close to 40% of freshmen report never having used academic advising as of their third quarter. Comments from freshmen who have <u>not</u> used these services suggest that the system confuses or even eludes new students. Many plead ignorance:

> I never heard anything about who my advisor is or if I even have one. I don't know where I would go about getting one. Dean's Office L&S?

> Academic Advising experiences? I don't even know I have an academic advisor. If I would have known I probably would not have gotten on Academic Probation. There are also more academic policies I do not know about.

> I've never used my advising program and I don't know who my advisor is. I think my advisor should be available and so far as I know he/she is not.

Some expect the campus to inform them personally about their academic advising options.

> I haven't really had an "academic advising experience" at this college. Not a whole lot of information is readily provided. I'm sure that there are more programs available than I am aware of.

> My two most serious concerns are with the Financial Aid department and academic advising. . . . Additionally, in terms of an academic advisor, I don't know who mine is or how to find out. I assume I have one through EOP, but I never received information about that either. I'd like to receive some advising, but where do I go? DEAN? MAJOR? PEER?

Of course, even freshmen familiar with academic advising services may choose not to use them. Several comments remind one of how many distractions—often very pleasant ones—new students face when they come to campus:

> I really enjoy the positive and encouraging environment here in Davis. There are a few problem areas (accessibility of financial aid counselors, for example), but they are outweighed by the overall quality of the system. I like the way the campus is set up and I find the library a very useful resource. Dorm living is a very positive process and the food is, well, edible. Advising services are available if you seek help (I'm pretty lazy when it comes to that). There are an amazing variety of social and recreational activities, and that is my favorite thing about attending UC Davis.

> I feel I have not used my Academic Advising as much as I should have. UC Davis has a lot to offer and I need to take more advantage of the things there is offered. I feel Davis is a great school. This is my first year here and I haven't done as well as I would have liked to. I do plan on using the resources available to me to help me do better in the future here at Davis.

Finally, some freshmen understand the advising system, appreciate the varied sources of academic advice and feel very comfortable using them:

> Since I have four older brothers and a sister in college and graduate school, I receive most of my advising from them. However, I have received some advising at UC Davis and I am very satisfied. I like the different types of advising, ranging from Deans' office to peer advisors. I also enjoy the availability of all the advisors. Overall, I feel that the advising offices have given me what I needed.

> I have experienced some difficult times at UC Davis and without the help of the Advising Staff in my college I fear to think what my life would be like without them. I have found Davis (campus) and the advising service to be like a second family.

These comments illustrate that freshmen vary in their understanding and ability to use the myriad advising services available. For students familiar with college and comfortable in its environment, a system as diverse as that at Davis—with its several different access points—may be ideal. However, many freshmen comments suggest that low usage levels do not necessarily indicate a lack of interest in or need for advising. On the contrary, many students who want academic advising well into their third quarter may not know how or where to obtain it.

A less frequently repeated theme in the comments concerns the availability of academic advisors. Comments from both a freshman and a senior suggest some advisors have difficulty in accommodating the increasing number of undergraduates:

> One of the weaknesses of the Academic Advising system is there are too many students assigned to one advisor. There are constantly big lines at their office and it takes a while to get in.

> I believe that some advisors have too many students and so they are unable to really know their students. Many advisors will advise something to a student based upon the "average" student ideal and it might not even apply to the student he is talking to. Since advisors play such a major role in determining some student's life course for 4 years, he/she should really make an effort to get to know them. Maybe if each department got more advisors, this would [help] them to take on the large number of students.

Some students were critical of the value of the information they received from their advisors. Again, their comments convey the sense that the system may be overwhelmed with the number of students seeking academic advising; that, perhaps as a result of increasing workload, advisors cannot keep up with changes in major and graduation requirements and course prerequisites. This junior talks about her advisor's ability to meet her needs as well as those of students in the advisor's classes:

> My advisor is very nice and understanding but I'm not sure that she's up to date on major requirements or graduate school requirements. Advisors should have to attend a program at the beginning of each academic year that updates them on changes in policies. They should also allot time specifically for advising. I go in during her office hours which is when she speaks to students who are taking classes from her. I feel that those students get a higher priority from her because they have papers and tests coming up.

Even when advisors have time for advising, students question the quality of the advice they receive, as reported by a sophomore:

> I like my advisor, but I don't feel he really knows much about the requirements and other aspects of the major. This is probably especially true of the lower division program. I am looking forward to developing a closer relationship with my advisor in the future, but I don't think I would ever come to him for academic advice. In short, I definitely respect and like my advisor as a professor and a person, but I feel that he doesn't have the information to provide me with useful academic advice.

and a freshman:

> Academic advisors or assistants to the advisors [are] often not clear in their responses to direct questions; they very often redirect you to someone else when they have no time to explain themselves, and redirect you from your initial intentions in opting for an easy way to resolve students' problems which usually are not helpful. Providing quality time and care to helping students will enable students to be less confused about their academic careers and goals at the University.

Sometimes what students do not say can be as enlightening as what they do. Respondents from the College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences report the highest satisfaction ratings on most of the academic advising variables discussed in this section. Despite the unique structure of advising centers available to them, however, none of their comments address this organization per se or attribute satisfaction to the college in particular. Nevertheless, analysis by college reveals that students from Agricultural and Environmental Sciences provide comments noticeably more positive and upbeat. In the same vein, their comments are far less critical of advisor availability, attitude or knowledge.

SOURCES OF ACADEMIC ADVICE

The first set of campus-developed questions addresses use of and satisfaction with primary sources of academic advising provided by the undergraduate colleges. These include:

Faculty advising within the major
Staff advising within the college or department
Departmental peer advising
College dean's office advising

In general, use of services varies considerably by level. Although not surprising, the relatively low levels of use reported by freshmen may cause some concern. Overall, as Table 4 indicates, a majority of respondents appear satisfied with the advising provided by each source. Where a particular group differs from others on a particular service, this difference is noted in the text summarizing results for each service. A summary of responses by college follows discussion of these services.

Table 4
Satisfaction with Sources of Academic Advising

		Level of Satisfaction					
	Percent Using Service	Very Satisfied 5	4	Neutral 3	2	Very Dissatisfied 1	Mean Rating
Faculty advising within major	70.7%	22.2%	41.2%	23.0%	8.9%	4.7%	3.67
Staff advising within college or department	62.5	24.6	45.0	19.8	8.8	1.8	3.82
Departmental peer advising	42.1	27.4	45.9	16.0	9.8	0.9	3.89
College dean's office	40.5	23.0	45.9	16.5	11.3	3.3	3.74

Note: Means and Levels of Satisfaction are based on a five-point scale in which 5=Very Satisfied and 1=Very Dissatisfied. Only students who used campus programs or services rated them.

Faculty Advising within the Major

Approximately 71% of undergraduates report having used faculty within their major for academic advising. The usage pattern by level observed in the previous section is even more dramatic when restricted to faculty academic advising. Only 41.8% of freshmen had used faculty for academic advising as compared with 72.4% of sophomores, 78.7% of juniors and 89.4% of seniors.

Almost two-thirds of the undergraduates who had used their major faculty for academic advising rate themselves satisfied (3.67). Mean satisfaction ratings for faculty advising do not differ significantly by respondent level. Ratings of faculty do differ significantly by college *(F=10.83)*; students in the College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences report the highest satisfaction rating (3.96) followed by students in Letters & Science (3.55) and those in Engineering (3.53).

Most comments about faculty advising take the form of testimonials, both positive and negative, of individual faculty members. Two secondary themes appear in the comments on faculty advising. First, students find receptive and helpful faculty to serve as academic advisors, but not always on the first try. In the words of this junior:

> It's very hard to find a faculty advisor that treats you as an individual rather than a student that they must see in order to meet their quota. Luckily, I have found a great one. He takes time out of his schedule and talks about your decisions rather than just look them over and sign a piece of paper.

Second, some students find the experience of seeking academic advice from faculty intimidating, as with this junior:

> I do not find my academic faculty advisor to be a friendly person. He does not seem to care about my future. He seems too engulfed in his work rather than concerned with student advising.

Staff Advising within the College or Department

Approximately 63% of undergraduates use staff advising within their college or academic department. Seniors are most likely to have used this service (76.9%), followed by juniors (76.7%), sophomores (56.3%) and freshmen (38.2%). Overall, about 70% of these students are satisfied with staff advising, with a mean rating of 3.82. Satisfaction with staff advising does not differ based on respondent level or college.

Some students comment about specific staff advisors, usually in the same testimonial form as those rating faculty members. Others comment on staff advising provided by a college or department program designed to support specific groups. For example, advisors from the Minority Engineering Program and the Biological Undergraduate Scholars Program were singled out by these freshmen:

> First of all, the academic advisors I am referring to, I think, are called faculty advisors, or they may be staff advisors. Anyway, it is the MEP program advisors (Minority Engineering Program). Second thing is that they are excellent for minorities, and that the minorities in college should find something like this as an advising service.

> A major part of my personal success here at UC Davis has been the activities going on throughout the year that are sponsored by the Summer Transitional Enrichment Program (STEP). My academic advising is done by the Biological Undergraduate Scholars Program (BUSP) where I have close contact with the Assistant Dean of Biological Sciences. I am a fortunate student to have experienced the STEP program and now I have become a promising student with the various academic opportunities that I have received through STEP and BUSP. The confident smile on my face is reflective of a support system that is working for me, and I would encourage UC Davis to maintain recruitment/retention program a "big deal" on their agenda for improvements.

Departmental Peer Advising

Fewer respondents (42.1%) report having used departmental peer advising, which is not available in every academic department; use ranged from 26.7% of freshmen to 50.3% of seniors. The mean satisfaction rating on this type of advising (3.89) is the highest given to any of the specific sources identified. Overall, satisfaction ratings do not differ on this service by college. Responses do vary

significantly by level *(F=4.23)*. Seniors express higher satisfaction than do other students. As with other highly rated services in the Student Opinion Survey, few respondents comment directly on this service.

College Dean's Office Advising

Approximately 40% of respondents report having used a college dean's office for academic advising. The spread in usage by level of this service is the largest of all services: 65.3% of seniors contrasted with only 16.6% of freshmen. This distribution most likely reflects the role of college dean's offices in providing degree checks for upper division students.

Students appear generally satisfied with academic advising from a college dean's office (3.74); there are no differences in ratings based on level or college.

Academic Advisors by College

As Table 5 indicates, faculty receive the highest mean rating of all advising sources in the College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences, a pattern reversed by the ratings of advisors in the other colleges. Usage of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences faculty advisors is also high; 78.9% of the students had seen a faculty advisor, as contrasted with 69.3% (Engineering) and 67.5% (Letters & Science).

Table 5
Satisfaction with Sources of Academic Advising by College

	Agricultural & Environmental Sciences			Letters & Science			Engineering		
	Percent Using Service	Mean Rating	*(sd)*	Percent Using Service	Mean Rating	*(sd)*	Percent Using Service	Mean Rating	*(sd)*
Faculty advising within major	78.9%	3.96	*(.88)*	67.5%	3.55	*(1.09)*	69.3%	3.53	*(1.18)*
Staff advising within college/dept.	60.9	3.86	*(.95)*	66.0	3.77	*(.96)*	46.4	4.11	*(1.00)*
Departmental peer advising	45.9	3.93	*(.97)*	42.0	3.87	*(.95)*	33.4	3.92	*(.84)*
College dean's office	39.7	3.84	*(.92)*	41.5	3.66	*(1.11)*	36.8	4.00	*(.79)*

Mean ratings are based on a five-point scale in which 5=Very Satisfied and 1=Very Dissatisfied.

Respondents also rate other advisors in the Agricultural and Environmental Sciences high, close to that for faculty. The spread in ratings for different advising sources in Letters and Science and Engineering is much wider; in both colleges, staff and peer advisors receive higher ratings than faculty. Only ratings of faculty differ significantly by college *(F=10.83)*, the are no significant differences in the ratings of staff, peer and dean's office advisors by college.

The data collected by this study do not provide a clearcut explanation for the differences in ratings of faculty by students in the three undergraduate colleges or why students in Letters and Science and Engineering report lower satisfaction with faculty than with peer or staff advisors. Respondent comments from these colleges suggest that some students perceive the quality of service provided by staff and peer advisors to be higher than that from faculty. As one junior in Letters and Science commented:

> There is a striking difference in the quality of service provided by the campus' Non-Faculty Advisors and Faculty. I am especially happy with the Dean's Office of Letters and Sciences, the Counseling Center and the Academic Options Advisors. On the other hand, faculty advisors and faculty in general are unavailable, to the point that any intrusion on their time is resented.

A sophomore in Engineering elaborates:

> My response to [faculty advising] was based solely on only one occasion that I talked with my faculty advisor. I asked him some questions about confusing statements printed in the General Catalog. He couldn't give me any solid answers and seemed to be too busy to deal with me, which I can understand since he was hired to teach, not to advise. Since then, I have sought academic advising elsewhere.

QUALITIES OF ACADEMIC ADVISORS

The second set of campus-developed questions asks students to voice opinions about certain qualities of their academic advisors. These questions were restricted to active participants in the academic advising system, defined as students who indicated one primary source of academic advice and who had met with their primary academic advisor at least once since the beginning of Fall Quarter 1989. Approximately 52% of respondents to this study meet these criteria.

While previous sections of the survey ask students to consider advising services or a set of advisors in general, this section focuses exclusively on experiences with their primary academic advisor. Using a five-point scale in which 5=Strongly Agree and 1=Strongly Disagree, students were asked to report their level of agreement with six statements about these advisors. Mean ratings on each statement appear on Table 6 (page following) for all advisors and for a subset of faculty advisors. Faculty represent the largest single group of advisors used by participants.[3]

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[3]*Ratings of other types of academic advisors can be obtained from Student Affairs Research and Information.*

Table 6
Qualities of Academic Advisors

Indicate your level of agreement with each statement about your primary advisor.

	All Advisors Mean Rating *(sd)*	Faculty Advisors Mean Rating *(sd)*
MY ADVISOR:		
Provides me with accurate information about requirements, prerequisites, etc.	4.11 *(.81)*	4.08 *(.81)*
Is on time for appointments with me.	4.11 *(.87)*	4.08 *(.90)*
Allows sufficient time to discuss issues or problems.	4.07 *(.76)*	4.15 *(.71)*
Is a helpful, effective advisor whom I would recommend to other students.	4.06 *(.91)*	4.05 *(.89)*
Helps me identify the steps I need to take to reach my educational goals.	3.95 *(.82)*	3.92 *(.89)*
Is available when I need assistance.	3.93 *(.89)*	3.93 *(.85)*

Note: Mean ratings and levels of agreement are based on a five-point scale in which 5=Strongly Agree and 1=Strongly Disagree.

As might be expected, when active users focus on and rate qualities of their personal advisors, opinion ratings shoot upward. The opinions represented by the data on Table 6 are among the most positive in the entire study. Respondents agree that their particular advisors provide them with accurate information, are on time for their appointments, and allow sufficient time to discuss issues or problems. Most also agree that they would recommend their advisors to other students. These findings hold for the subset of faculty advisors as well. Students feel much more positive about their primary academic advisors than advisors or the advising system overall.

One systematic pattern of difference in responses across these variables is by undergraduate college; mean ratings by college appear on Table 7 (page following).

Table 7
Qualities of Academic Advisors by College

Indicate your level of agreement with each statement about your primary advisor.

	Agricultural & Environmental Sciences		Letters & Science		Engineering	
	All Mean Rating *(sd)*	Faculty Mean Rating *(sd)*	All Mean Rating *(sd)*	Faculty Mean Rating *(sd)*	All Mean Rating *(sd)*	Faculty Mean Rating *(sd)*
MY ADVISOR:						
Provides me with accurate information about requirements, prerequisites, etc.	4.33 *(.62)*	4.31 *(.58)*	4.05 *(.84)*	4.05 *(.84)*	3.80 *(.96)*	3.50 *(.90)*
Is on time for appointments with me.	4.37 *(.75)*	4.34 *(.81)*	4.03 *(.87)*	4.03 *(.91)*	3.75 *(.99)*	3.57 *(.87)*
Allows sufficient time to discuss issues or problems.	4.20 *(.70)*	4.27 *(.67)*	4.04 *(.77)*	4.14 *(.69)*	3.89 *(.84)*	3.78 *(.88)*
Is a helpful, effective advisor whom I would recommend to other students.	4.23 *(.86)*	4.21 *(.96)*	3.97 *(.93)*	4.02 *(.84)*	4.02 *(.94)*	3.71 *(.87)*
Helps me identify the steps I need to take to reach my educational goals.	4.14 *(.71)*	4.20 *(.77)*	3.90 *(.84)*	3.85 *(.89)*	3.66 *(.94)*	3.50 *(1.02)*
Is available when I need assistance.	4.15 *(.76)*	4.12 *(.75)*	3.88 *(.91)*	3.93 *(.87)*	3.55 *(.99)*	3.36 *(.85)*

Note: Mean ratings and levels of agreement are based on a five-point scale in which 5=Strongly Agree and 1=Strongly Disagree.

Compared with respondents from other colleges, students in Agricultural and Environmental Sciences report higher levels of agreement for advisors generally and faculty advisors in particular on all six measures. Respondents emphatically agree that faculty provide accurate information, are on time, and allow sufficient time to discuss problems or issues with students. Their lowest rating, advisor availability, is still very high (4.12).

Respondents from the College of Letters and Science also give faculty advisors consistently high ratings, ranging from 4.14 (allowing sufficient advising time) to 3.85 (helping students reach their educational goals). The mean ratings of Letters and Science students based on their recent experiences with their primary faculty advisors are very much higher than the mean rating all students give to faculty advisors from that college (3.55). This finding, together with comments from respondents, suggests that one problem with faculty advising in Letters and Science may be the availability of faculty advisors. As the data on Table 7 indicate, students who are able to establish a relationship with a faculty advisor in this college are very satisfied with it.

Respondents from Engineering are less likely to agree that these statements apply to their faculty; they rate faculty advisors particularly low on availability, providing accurate information and helping students reach their educational goals. Ratings of students who met with their primary faculty advisor in 1989-90 are more in line with those reported by respondents from this college for faculty advisors in general (3.53).

Comments on Academic Advising

The comments of respondents who actively participate in the academic advising system suggest that such students differ from non-participants in areas not measured in this study. Their comments often mention unproductive first attempts at entering the advising system, followed by further efforts that finally result in successful advising relationships. These students assume responsibility for initiating contact with academic advisors and do not appear to be easily discouraged. Here is the comment of one active participant in her junior year:

> Davis provides education to self-motivated students willing to seek help. Advising with the Deans' Offices or major advisors is often difficult to get. Students need to be well aware of their own responsibilities and requirements because nobody at UCD will "hold the student's hand." Peer advising is strong at Davis through Resident Advisors, Major Peer Advisors, and Academic Options programs.

And from another participant, a freshman:

> Concerning the academic advising services, I believe that many people are unhappy with the services because they are not aware of the services provided. Some people complain that they don't have an advisor and are not treated equally. Personally, I think this complaint is because of the person's lack of determination to find out about the services offered. A solution to this problem might be to distribute more information to students specifically aimed at advertising academic advising services. It gets old listening to students gripe about the help that other students receive, and that they are unable to get their advantages.

This senior was not discouraged by his initial advisor assignment:

> In my above responses concerning faculty advisors, etc., my responses were based on the faculty member whom I use as my advisor and not the one assigned to me. If I replied on the grounds of the advisor assigned to me my responses would have been less favorable.

Several comments from non-participants indicate that the campus should assume responsibility for initiating the advising process. Comments from two sophomores reflect this theme:

> It should be the University's responsibility that each student is on the right track. Each student should be required to visit his/her advisor each year.

> Obviously, I can't say much, but it would have helped if my advisor had contacted me at the beginning of the year instead of having me contact him.

One junior, echoing these thoughts, wishes she had entered the advising system earlier:

My academic advising experience at UC Davis has been average. I only recently went to see my advisor, and this is my third year in school. I only went because of the hold on my registration. It was a very valuable meeting for me, and I wish that I had come in sooner; thus, perhaps, for people like myself, it should be mandatory that once per year that a student meets with his/her advisor. I don't think I would have even gone this year to see my advisor if a hold had not been placed on my registration. In order to get people like me into the advising offices more often than once every three years, perhaps it should be a rule to go at least once per year.

Relying on student initiative to establish effective advising relationships may result in painful repercussions for those students who need advising the most. This freshman describes a disturbing scenario:

I feel that when students are not advancing academically, they should be sought and guided. Many of them are afraid and do not know where to turn, so they just hope that they will do better the next quarter. They fall in a trap and further perform inadequately and eventually, if they are not helped, drop out of school.

ACADEMIC ADVISING NEEDS

This section discusses a set of questions that ask about advising needs of undergraduates. The survey included the following campus-developed questions:

How well do you understand your academic major requirements?

How well do you understand your General Education requirements?

How well developed are your academic goals at UC Davis?

How well developed are your postgraduate career goals?

Overall, how well does the academic advising system offered at UC Davis meet your needs?

Responses to these questions appear on Table 8 (page following). A large majority of respondents report a more than adequate understanding of their academic major (3.88) and General Education (3.92) requirements. In addition, about two-thirds report that their academic goals at UC Davis are more than adequately or well developed (3.79). By contrast, student ratings reflect concern about the development of their postgraduate career goals (3.20). In addition, many respondents judge the campus advising system overall to be inadequate (16.3%) or just adequate (43.6%) in meeting their advising needs.

Table 8
Advising Needs of Undergraduates

	Very Well 5	More than Adequately 4	Adequately 3	Less than Adequately 2	Very Poorly 1	Mean Rating
How well do you understand your academic major requirements?	36.2%	27.2%	27.2%	7.6%	1.8%	3.88
How well do you understand your General Education requirements?	41.9	20.0	27.9	8.4	1.7	3.92
How well developed are your academic goals at UC Davis?	27.5	35.5	26.3	9.6	1.1	3.79
How well developed are your postgraduate career goals?	16.8	23.8	28.1	24.7	6.6	3.20
How well does the academic advising system meet your needs?	13.4	26.7	43.6	13.2	3.1	3.34

Note: Distributions and Mean Ratings are based on a five-point scale in which 5=Very Well and 1=Very Poorly.

As noted earlier, several students commented negatively on the General Education section of the *General Catalog*; nonetheless, respondents overall report a relatively high level of understanding of these requirements (3.92). Ratings on GE requirements differ significantly by level *(F=17.15)*. Freshmen report the lowest understanding of GE requirements; their mean rating is 3.49.

Freshmen also report lower mean ratings on understanding their academic major requirements and the development of their academic goals at UC Davis. In both cases, their mean ratings (3.42 and 3.56, respectively) are considerably lower than those of all students. As relative newcomers to college, freshmen predictably have a less clear understanding of what is expected of them and of what they should expect of themselves. When combined with their relatively low use of academic and career advising, however, this confusion provides the campus much more cause for concern. It is possible that some fifth-year seniors begin as freshmen who spend a year or more wandering through the curriculum with neither clear direction nor adequate advising.

Students from the College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences report the highest mean rating on how well the academic advising system meets their needs. Mean ratings differ significantly by college *(F=11.30)*, and range from 3.58 for Agricultural and Environmental Sciences to 3.32 for Engineering and 3.23 Letters and Science.

The relatively low score given by all respondents when asked to rate how well the academic advising system at UC Davis meets their needs represents, at first glance, a surprising note on which to end this report. Mean ratings on this variable are lower than those reported for academic advising services overall, for each of the primary sources of academic advice identified, and in particular for each of the ratings students give their primary academic advisors. Why would respondents respond positively on these earlier variables and then report such a lukewarm response to this question?

One explanation for this finding may be inherent to the question itself, in the phrase "meet your needs." Here student expectations of academic advising come into play as do other aspects of advising not addressed in this study. Consider the comments of several respondents who report being satisfied or very satisfied with academic advising yet who still express the absence of some essential quality or outcome:

> What about the faculty? I find the professors, male and female, tend to not try hard to meet my demand for scholastic advising. I am a relatively new student and up to now am dissatisfied. I want to establish somewhat of a relationship with my professors.

> I think the advising staff at Davis (personally my advisor) does not know the individual personally, and gives the sense that there is no understanding involved on their part. They aren't personable.

> I enjoyed my advisor but he didn't really talk to me the way I wanted him too. He just gave me papers and sent me on my way.

The lack of a personal touch can exacerbate the feelings of alienation that come with size. Although the comments below single out two of the larger departments when making this point, there is no reason to believe that these departments are unique.

> With 20,000 undergrads coming to advisors for advice, I realize it's difficult to solve everyone's future goal problems. However, I came in to this school very bewildered about what I was doing and where I was going. As a junior I still don't have a clear view of what I will be doing or what I want to do. I feel that the University does not offer enough programs or recognition of programs for people like me, people who need help evaluating what their goals are, what they are good at and like. I also feel the advisors don't take the students' problems seriously enough. I agree that students must be willing to ask, but as well advisors should be willing to advise.

> My biggest problem with the advising in the Psychology Department is that they are so much more concerned about academics (taking right classes, etc.) that I feel more like a number than a human being. Once I was informed that I was taking the right classes, which I already knew, I was of no more concern to them. I realize that individuality in such a large school is practically impossible, but maybe a little more humanness would make trips to the advising department a little better.

It is impossible on the basis of the comments alone to distinguish these satisfied respondents from students who indicate they are dissatisfied with academic advising, such as the following two:

> I feel very dissatisfied overall with the academic advising services offered to me during my almost three years at Davis. I am almost a senior and still do not have a direction of study and each time I asked for help in the past, I have been made to feel unimportant. Biological Science is my declared major but I will not stay with it because of the impersonal treatment I have received.

> Here at UC Davis, I find that academic advising is treated as some sort of burden. My first impression of my advisor is that he could really care less about who I was, what I wanted from my education and where I want to go. I almost felt like apologizing for taking so much of his precious time. While I realize that the difference in tuition between USC and UCD is quite substantial, students still pay good money to attend this university and I feel the least they deserve is to be treated as people, not as burdens.

These comments suggest that students who are satisfied with academic advising services, as well as those who are not, have advising needs that cannot be met by being on time for appointments, providing accurate information or even helping them to identify educational goals. They reflect the desire of students to become active partners in the academic enterprise. Although students may rate advising services satisfactory overall, they will not judge them as meeting their needs fully until advisors are perceived as addressing these more personal ones.

In the words of this senior:

> Advisors often seem uninterested and unwilling to mentor. I believe student and advisor should forge an intellectual bond, which can only be accomplished through discussion and intellectual exchange of ideas and philosophy.

Such expectations may present an insurmountable challenge to the colleges as they struggle to meet the demands of teaching, research and public service in an environment of increasingly strained resources. It may be that student expectations will have to adjust as well.

SUMMARY

Several themes emerge from among the findings of this study on advising at UC Davis. Primary among them is that undergraduates are generally satisfied with advising services. They report consistently higher ratings on advising services than do their counterparts nationally and, despite large increases in enrollment, satisfaction ratings on most of these services have not declined substantially from those reported by Davis undergraduates in 1987. Also, student ratings of recent experiences with their primary academic advisors are exceptionally positive. Nonetheless, undergraduates express several areas of concern to themselves and the campus at large.

First, satisfaction with career planning services declined sharply from 1987, for students from all class levels and colleges. In addition, fewer than half of all students, from freshmen to seniors, report that their postgraduate career goals are more than adequately developed. These findings, together with several student comments, suggest that students do not see a clearcut transition from their undergraduate studies to postgraduate outcomes. Students do not isolate particular units in their comments; instead, they appear to be concerned across-the-board with this aspect of advising services.

Second, advising in the freshman year stands out as a possible area of weakness in the advising system. Almost 40% of freshmen report using no academic advising services during their first three quarters at Davis. The percent jumps to 58% of freshmen who do not see a faculty advisor in their major during their first year. Not surprisingly, freshmen also report low levels of understanding of their major and General Education requirements and report that their academic goals at UC Davis are less than or just adequately developed.

Third, student satisfaction ratings of faculty advising in the colleges of Letters and Science and Engineering are significantly lower than those in Agricultural and Environmental Sciences. Usage of faculty advising is also lower; 79% of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences respondents have used faculty advising in their major compared with 69% and 68% of students in Engineering and Letters and Science, respectively.

Fourth, when asked how well the academic advising system at UC Davis meets their needs, a majority of students report less than adequately or just adequately. Comments suggest that students perceive the advising system to be impersonal and unconcerned with them as individuals.